

A photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there is a green field with a wooden fence and some tall grasses. In the middle ground, there is a small white house with a dark roof, surrounded by trees and a parking lot. The background shows a line of trees and a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

Chapter V

Stories of the Meaning of Home

Michele Board
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Chapter V

Stories of the Meaning of Home

"Ah! there is nothing like staying at home for real comfort."
Emma by Jane Austen. Ch 14

This book tells the stories of home of Dan, Tessa, Ruth, Barbara, Paul and Karen*. They took photographs of what home means to them, then they sat down and interpreted the meaning of the photographs with the researcher. Then small panels of people also looked at the photographs to see if they could interpret the meaning of home from just the photographs. These layers of interpretation revealed so much about the importance of home for these six people. Here is the next layer of interpretation revealing what home means to Dan, Tessa, Ruth, Barbara, Paul and Karen.

*All names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

2 of 2 Volumes

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Dan's Story

Dan is 61 years old and has lived in his cottage in a rural location 35 years. He lives with his second wife Ann and their 10 year old son Neil. He has two older children from his first marriage, but they have left home. He works full-time as a managing director of a local science based company.

Dan has lived all his life in a rural location and feels he could never live in a big town or city. His sense of arriving home begins as he enters the valley where his cottage is situated. He feels a sense of "homeness" as he enters the valley.

He feels that as he enters the valley all the "rigours of his journey" and what has gone before can be left behind. He wants to shut himself away from the world and feel some "element of security, a comfort blanket perhaps", when he gets home, something that is clearly important. The entrance to the valley makes him feel he's arrived home symbolising a "safe and secure" refuge.



"It's not just the house that I regard as home but that I feel I have arrived at home; and it's a strong feeling I have and I'm touched by it every time and particularly even if I've only been away a few days..... I particularly wanted to take a picture [roadside view above village] and perhaps discuss that sort of aspect, that sort of feeling of homeness".



Both he and Ann are very attached to the valley and when they talk about moving they know they would not want to live anywhere else. This need for safety and security when he is 'home' is evident even on the outside of the home, since the front door cannot be easily seen, shielded by high hedges all the way round.

Dan cannot imagine ever wanting to live anywhere else. The fact that the surrounding countryside never appears to change is very reassuring. Being part of a community, being familiar with the people in the local pub, is something he evidently enjoys and needs.

"I know most everybody, yeh, I go to the pub and they all know me, they stop and chat so yeh. That's really quite nice".

Whilst living in the cottage, Dan has extended and rebuilt much of the property. Despite not being a builder or thatcher by trade he has painstakingly invested much of himself and what he wants into his home. He cut the reed locally and used this to thatch the cottage himself. He is enormously proud of his home, saying it is more than just a building

"I feel there is a lot of me in the house, it is a home as well. It's not like if you just move into a house and someone has built it. It's like it has grown with me very much over these years. It's a strange feeling really. It's almost like a kind of oneness with it really in the context of pretty much every room has been rewired and re plastered and I've done everything".





He has a patriarchal sense of ownership of his home. The panel also noted that there was no sign of a 'feminine touch' in the photographs he had taken, with neutral colours and a strong, square, masculine sofa.

For Dan the home has evolved, with him and his first wife living there, then him and his first 2 children; then him on his own and finally with Ann and Neil. He feels the house demonstrates a "historical" record of his life, his own legacy. The photographic reminder of his birthday celebrations in the latest extension of his home is an indication of Dan and his house growing older together.

His sense of "oneness" with the house could exclude Ann. He was relieved when she let him "keep the house" when they married, although he had to agree to change every fixture and fitting! Ann was also very much part of the decision to build the conservatory, a room where they spend much of their time.

His attachment to the house is immense and he feels if he had to leave it would be a "huge wrench". His patriarchal sense of ownership continues as he feels that the house would be impractical for Ann to manage on her own if he were to die, something he thinks about because he is 15 years older than Ann.



His home fulfils his need to feel safe, secure and comforted, away from the everyday pressures of working life, saying:

"... I think there are different points at times that can pressure you, it depends what's going on, so yeh, I definitely have a feeling of refuge within the house, we'll all be safe and secure, just close the door and....(laugh) that will be fine (laugh)".

Not only does he feel at one with the fabric of the building, but also the sounds and smells in the house make him feel 'at home'. The familiarity of the environment, the creaking sounds of the stairs, even retaining the chipped tea cup he has had for years are all comforting. Despite the traditional roles in the family, - Ann cooks, he builds and does the garden, he took a photograph of the Aga. This helps him retain the feeling that home is his sanctuary. He explained how it represents warmth and cosiness and that even the sound of it working is reassuring:

"It's always very warm and it make a gentle sort of chugging noise, chug, chug, and the flames you can sort of hear... if you're in the house on your own it's a gentle comfort as you hear this chugging. You can hardly hear it when there's someone else talking, it's a gentle sort of noise".

Home is more than feeling safe and secure. Being a father of three and bringing them up in this home is important for his concept of home. He has nostalgic memories of when his children were young and he would sit in the windowsill of the nursery and read stories to them. Despite the room no longer being a nursery he always thinks of it as such. When he divorced his first wife, he retained custody of his two children, as he wanted to maintain continuity for them in their home life. It pleases him that his two adult children still think of his house as home.





Dan and Ann have discussed moving at times. The topic comes up when friends or family move. He considers the impracticalities of living in an old property that needs constant attention, as he ages. However, despite conversations about moving, the it is never resolved. It's just too difficult for him to contemplate. He sets the context of the conversations they have,

"Occasionally it comes up in the context – would we want to live here forever or what age would you feel when you didn't want to be here? And that gets tricky cos we never really talk about it, we talk about it but never really resolve it. I mean we talk about it but it's all too open ended; it's all too difficult".

He senses that he needs to try and rationalise to others why he wants to stay there. He thinks he may be boring or insecure, but he says, "I tend to just rationalise it to myself in that I'm very happy and very comfortable".

So, for Dan home is primarily a refuge. His valley, his village, his community and his home are places which make him feel securely anchored in a safe place. But there is also a strong sense that Dan's feeling of home is centred on himself. He exhibits a patriarchal ownership of the house. He can't imagine himself ever living elsewhere, yet he can imagine his wife living elsewhere. Other people are mentioned mainly as stages in his life and he sees his home as a reflection of his marriages, his children and even his own ageing. This symbiosis between Dan and his home is perhaps so strong because he built so much of the house himself.

Tessa's Story

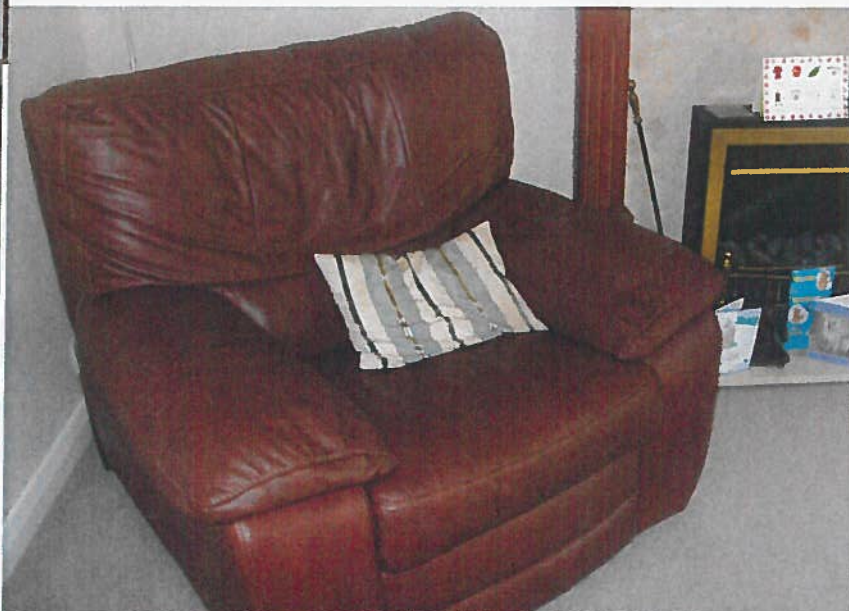


Tessa is 59 years old and lives with her husband, Ed, in a detached bungalow in a small town. Tessa and Ed have lived in the bungalow for 25 years. Tessa is a part-time receptionist at a local GP surgery. Ed is a retired policeman and now works as a children's entertainer.

Tessa and Ed have two grown up daughters called Sue and Sam. Sue has two children of her own, Jane aged six and Peter aged four. Sam lives reasonably near to Tessa and Ed and Sue lives about two hours away.

Tessa clearly articulated that she divides "home" into two categories, the environment or materialistic home, and the home she associates with her family.

When Tessa goes on holiday she is always keen to return to the "material" things in her home. She loves her armchair that faces the garden, a place where she sits each morning and contemplates the day ahead, and mulls over any problems she may have:



"So home for me, if I was away, as I say, if we've been away to Florida. I suppose when I think about home to come back to, it's that chair with that view and I did mean to actually do a cup of tea because that's the thing I actually look forward to come home to".

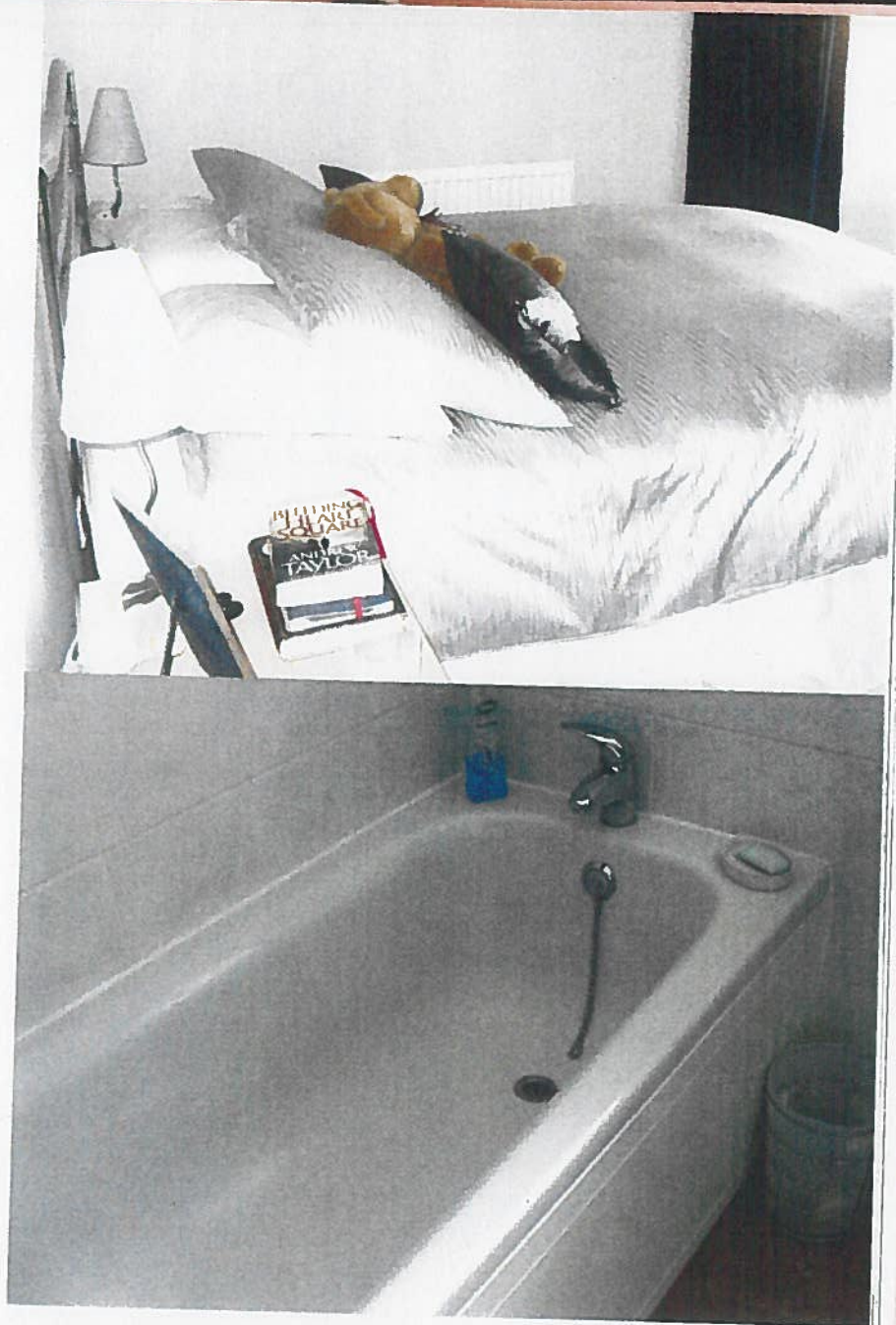
The view of the garden, watching the birds and squirrels is something she finds very relaxing and very much 'at home'. The panel felt the chair was very comforting for Tessa, enveloping her and making her feel very secure. Tessa adds:



"And that's how I suppose I see my home its where I am most relaxed too, in the environment".

Their significance was not lost on the panel which recognised Tessa's need for her own space, without clutter and her own. However, the teddy bear on the bed suggested Tessa's need for comfort and security. She says about her home,

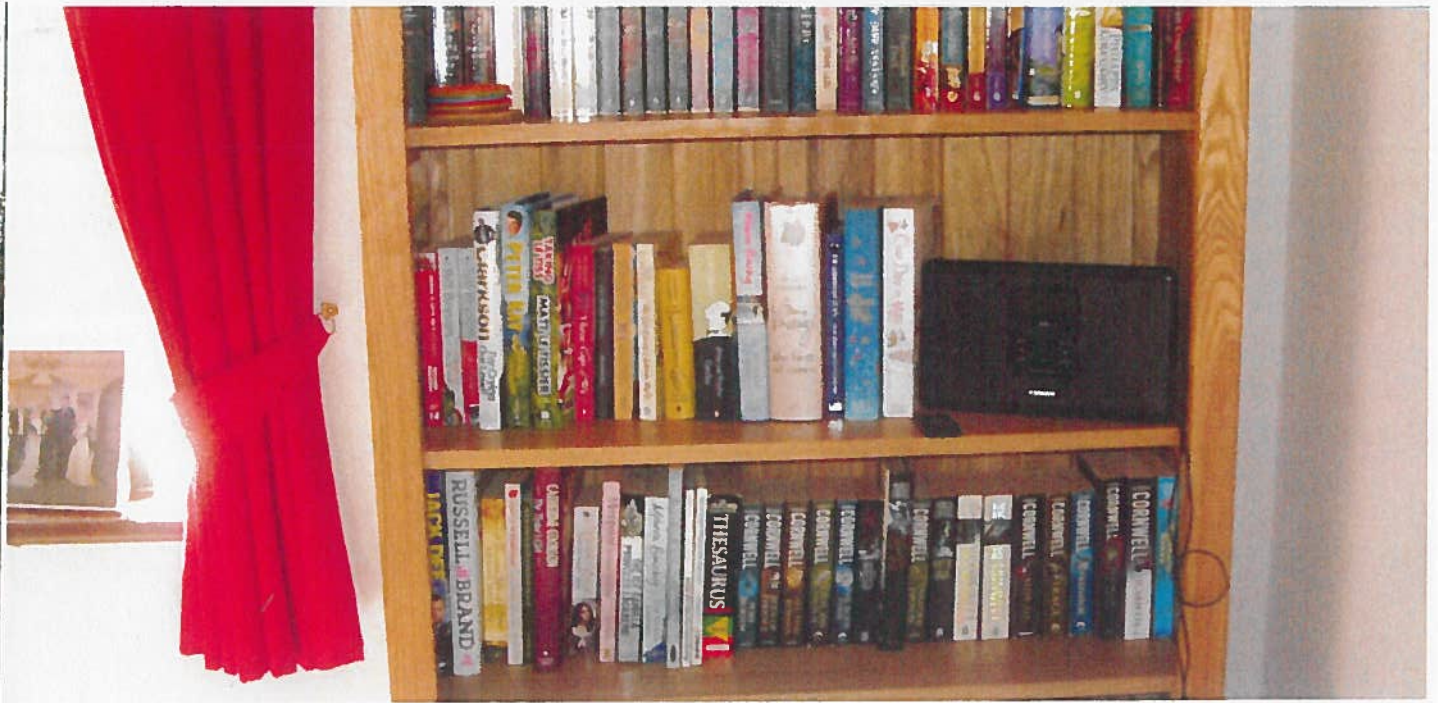
"I suppose I'm in my safe environment, I suppose. I can just feel relaxed and be myself".



Having her own bed and bath are also important 'material' things for Tessa. The photographs of both these areas are bland, almost sterile. The colours in the rooms do not convey the sense of comfort or significance that Tessa expresses, "I suppose home is having my own bathroom and my bed and that chair".

Tessa believes she is not attached to the bungalow where she lives. Despite living there a long time she says she is not emotional about it and would not mind moving house. She feels if in later life she was left on her own she would not manage to maintain the garden, so would have to move to a smaller property. However, having her own space and own material things are very important, "I would be happy to move elsewhere as long as I had certain things around me". This is further reinforced when she discusses the caravan that she and Ed had for many years saying,

"I am happiest, I am more content when I am at home. And I suppose, I am lucky enough, because Ed is the same, when we go away. And it's funny enough, we've always said.... we always had a caravan up to not long ago really... but we've liked it because it is like our own home".



Tessa needs the security of her own space, such as the chair being able to see outside, and participate in the activities she enjoys in the home, namely reading and watching sport on the television. To emphasise this point she was keen to show the photograph of the television when the cricket was on, and debated whether she should photograph her Kindle or the book shelf, saying:

"That's my two things I do in the home, as I see as home, one is, as I say, is watching the sport and another thing is reading. I love to read. So I thought I'd taken a picture of my Kindle. No, so we'll do the books. So that's why I've taken those really. So, I suppose that's the home around me".



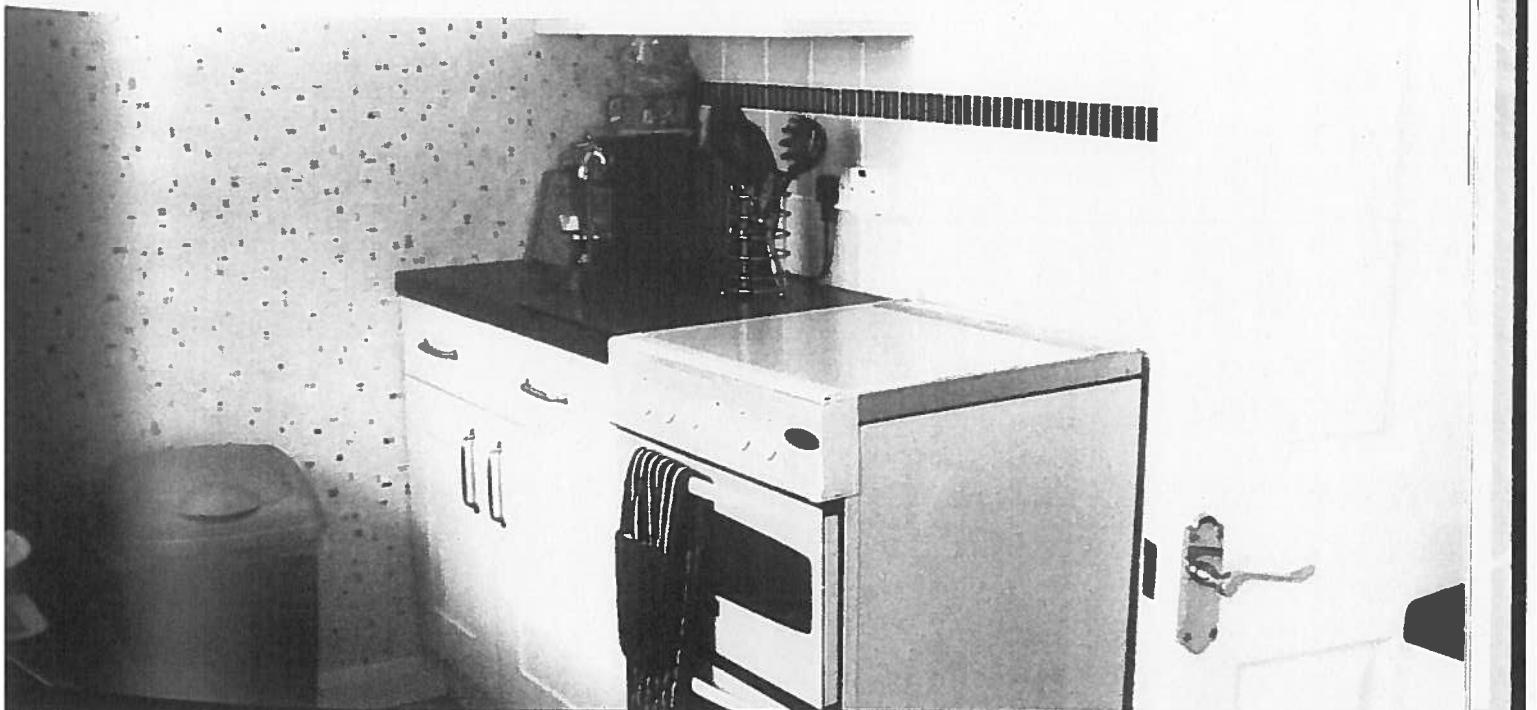
Tessa feels "at home" with her own place to sit, sleep and bathe and undertake her personal interests, benefiting from the comfort that they offer.

Tessa's home is very much associated with her family and friends. Despite saying she could live anywhere, when she did move from her current location she was terribly homesick, needing to live nearer to her place of birth and her parents.

"The only time I moved away was when Ed first joined the police force we had to move to another town. I hated it there. Again, I was away from family, I'd never been away from Mum and Dad before. And I had Sue".

She discussed at length the relationships with her family emphasising how important they are to her. The traditional roles of cooking and the kitchen being the heart of the home is not a feeling Tessa has.

The kitchen photograph was particularly sparse and lacking a sense of homeliness, noted by the panel. The kitchen is not the heart of her home, Tessa hates cooking leaving that chore to Ed!





Tessa's garden has toys for her grandchildren who visit every two to three weeks. Her daughters and grandchildren make life worthwhile. She said:

"But, as I say, with the grandchildren I didn't think they would change my life as much as they have done. But I just couldn't be without them".

She believes that, before the grandchildren arrived she and Ed would have moved to Spain; however it was Ed who couldn't leave his daughters. Tessa's gives the impression of having simple straightforward needs to feel at home. That her home is more about the people and some specific pieces of furniture, which make her feel safe and "at home". However, there are many references for the need to feel safe giving an impression of unmet needs.

Reviewing all the photo's the panel felt that there was a barrier or distance between Tessa's life and living her life. One panel member felt there was a "blockage", stopping Tessa from moving on in her life. The bland décor in her bedroom and bathroom, the solitary activities of reading and watching sport, also sitting and looking at the garden, or "stage" as others played, suggested Tessa needed escapist activities, yet the teddy on the bed implies the need for comfort.

The panel's observation that there appeared to be a "blockage" was very insightful since Tessa became quite emotional discussing at length the loss of her parents, and the guilt she feels because she was not at her father's bedside when he died. Tessa is still grieving over the loss of her parents several years ago, resulting in unmet needs and the need to feel safe sat in her own armchair, looking out of the window into the garden.

"I suppose I just feel my own comfort zone. I can just feel relaxed. It's just. I don't know I just feel safe in that. I suppose that's the thing. I just feel safe. It's not so much with that. It's definitely that with the window. I've always done that. I always come to that window. That is something that I would really miss. Yeah, I suppose I'm in my safe environment, I suppose. I can just feel relaxed and be myself".

For Tessa her bungalow is just a place. The "things" and the people she shares her life with make this place her home. It means that if she had to move she could. Her chair for example is key, but it is looking out of the window, reinforcing the idea that home could be anywhere. However, she does need the stability of home somewhere, to make her feel comforted and secure, even if that was a static caravan.

Tessa gave the impression of someone who was in control and relaxed but her unresolved grief is unsettling and she relies upon her chair to relax and be at home. Tessa concludes by saying:

"I do like my own home. And although I enjoy going away, I always enjoy coming back".



Ruth's Story

Ruth is 61 years old and lives with her husband, Tim, in a house in semi-rural location. Ruth is a freelance researcher and works from home. Tim goes out to work each day.

The couple have lived in the house for 18 months. They have two grown-up children, neither of whom lives at home. They have two dogs, Millie and Molly.

Ruth and Tim have "created" a home in five different properties since they married, the last four all in a relatively close geographical area.

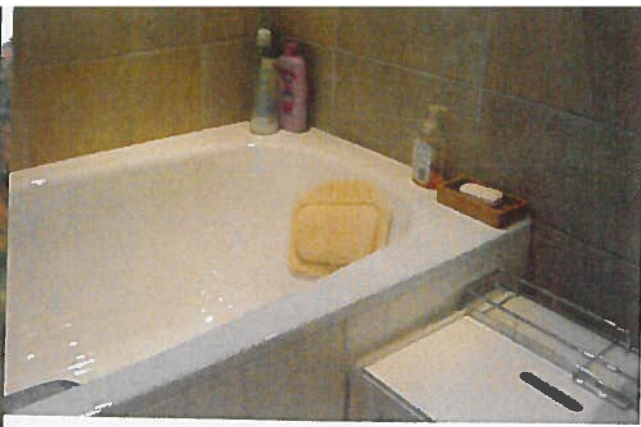
This is home number five. Ruth particularly loved house number three; however Tim was keen to move to increase their financial assets in property. There is a sense of regret when she talks about this particular move, saying:

"We were there about 15 years. I never wanted to leave there. It was the best place. I loved that house. Loved the house, loved the road, loved everything about it. But... I guess Tim wanted to move more than I did. And we thought it was a sensible thing to do, this whole idea of you know making some money on the house or whatever".

Ruth however does like the idea of a "project" and "doing up" a house ready to re-sell at some time to "make a killing". She adds that they quickly felt at home in their current house, but says they will move again.

"So....I suppose we still live in this house with an air of, we will have to sell this house so we will have to ...make it saleable rather than have it entirely as we maybe would want. Although we would have it as we wanted but we..., do you know what I mean, there's always in the back of your mind: this isn't going to be here forever and we're going to make a killing on it..."





Ruth's exploration of what home means has two contrasting themes. One is her success at being able to create home wherever she has lived in; the other is that she currently feels she is living in a cage causing her to reassess what home means,

"I'm finding it more of a... cage...than a...not a cage. More of a I don't know. I'm reassessing what I think about home".



In all her houses Ruth says she has been able to "create" home, and she is very reflective as she considers this. It soon becomes clear that comfort is a key concept that she refers to when describing her needs in a home. Sometimes this is psychological comfort.

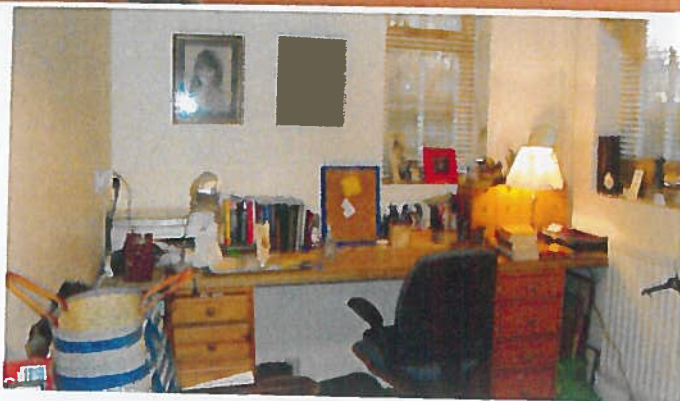
For example, she says that, as she approaches the outside of her front door, she is comforted by the crunching sound of the gravel; it reminds her of the comfort of returning home.

But, more often, it is articulated from a physical perspective. She loves the comfort of her own bed and the feel of her own linen; she enjoys a long soak in her bath and the feel of the under-floor heating in the bathroom. For example she says:



"I think I'm quite a comfort person, because... it's really important to me to have nice bed linen and I change it regularly. And we've got this enormously wide six foot bed that is so comfortable that whenever we go anywhere else it's horrible"

Creating home for Ruth also includes certain things, which she keeps in her own specific space in the house. Ruth and Tim have their own study, which is their individual space, and they also have shared space, the kitchen and the sitting room. In her study Ruth has a collection of things she loves, for example her Buddhas', pictures of her children, her chair she uses for meditation and her favourite rug, saying:



"That's one of my things, that rug. I love that rug. I don't know why, but I just love the colours of it. I love everything about it. And I like that chair. I always sit in that chair and meditate because it's comfortable".



This aspect of choice and control is reinforced when she discusses what home isn't or wouldn't be for her. When she and Tim first moved to the area when they were first married, they lived in a youth hostel for two weeks, and Ruth retains how much she hated communal living.



"I hated it. I hated that public living. Eating in front...I don't mind eating in front of people at all normally, but you know, having your breakfast, everything, all together all the time, I found that very distressing".

However, for Tim this is less of an issue because he was at boarding school as a child. Hence his lack of specific attachment to place and eagerness to move for financial gain.



Ruth's idea of home is implied by what she doesn't say as much as by what she does say. Her need for control and choice in her home is evident when she visits a friend with dementia who is living in a residential setting. She is scathing as she says her friend's room looks nothing like her home had,

"I don't know, there's no way.... it's going to ever look like home there. And her room doesn't look anything like her house did when she was there."

Being in control of her house seems to be a strong aspect of Ruth's idea of home. Creating "home" extends to the community where she is living and she is proud that the relationships she forms last even after moving. She wants a sense of belonging to a community, yet moving home interrupts this.

Owning and walking her beloved Millie and Molly is key to building relationships in the community,

"you go out with the dogs and you bump into people all the time, which is really nice".

She retains these friendships even after moving home relishing the "millions" of Christmas cards she sends to all her former neighbours.



Ruth feels skilled at being able to create her home, but her confidence as being to do keep doing this is damaged.

The panel recognised the attempt to "create" home, but felt sadness at the sight of the garden seat. Ruth was keen to say that the seat had to be part of the sale, yet the panel saw a seat, protected from the outside by hedges and looking inwards towards the house. They sensed the feelings of isolation that Ruth was expressing.



Ruth had had a period of poor health, this had influenced the timing of the previous move, and the speed with which they undertook the refurbishment of this house, "well we decided...we thought we had to do it quickly". Ruth's health had also reduced the amount of work she had on, making her feel trapped inside her home, she poignantly says:

"I work from home and haven't got a lot of work at the moment, and so I'm finding it more of a... cage...than a...not a cage. More of a I don't know. I'm reassessing what I think about home".

Not having the distraction of going out to work, and then 'coming home' at the end of the day, influences her feelings about home. Whilst having a study, she prefers to use this for her meditation, looking at her 'things' and watching the television. She spread her work out in the shared space of the kitchen. The warmth of the Aga and the companionship of the dogs make this a cosy space. The private space of her office however is where she can relax and be very much at home.

Living in the semi-rural location is not living up to her expectations, she feels trapped, and unable to relax because of all the work she sees that needs to be done in the house,

"It was our dream to live in the country, or at least somewhere more rural. And um.. I do...my...I do feel hemmed in by it, definitely, in a way, that...because I'm not going out to work. I'm here more than I ever was. I think. So I can understand the idea of getting hemmed in by somewhere.....and irritated by all the things that need to be done".



The current change in work patterns has made her consider what home means and not being able to separate her work and home life, being at home for long periods on her own, reduces the comfort she wants from home. She appears to mourn the loss of house number three, but also the impact of her illness has made her consider her own mortality and the potential morbidity of later life. She says she will have to move again and whilst this has been a common feature in her life, with age she may feel less confident at being able to re- create home once more.

Ruth's need to reassess what she wants from a home could be driven by frequent moves, her illness, her change in work patterns – all of which have undermined her confidence in her ability to create a home again. For Ruth, being comfortable and cosy at home is very important. She has worked hard to create this. Her large bed with crisp linen, her meditation chair and rug and the big bath for long relaxing soaks are aspects she enjoys about her home. Yet her current house is not fully Ruth's idea of home.

What she says is wrong with this house is very telling about Ruth's idea of what home really means to her. For whatever reason, she needs more stability than before. All the change in her life means that she feels that she has lost control of her life in her home. She feels she's "in a cage", trapped by circumstances beyond her control, making her unsure whether she will be able recreate a sense of "home" again. She concludes, perhaps wistfully, that "home" has become a "movable feast". The "feast" is obviously important and one she has enjoyed, but at this current time she doesn't have a house which fits her needs in a home and she is wondering if her ideal home can be made again.





Barbara's Story

Barbara was born in 1963. She has lived in an urban setting in a seaside resort on the south coast of England all her adult life, having moved from Wales as a young adult. Barbara is one of seven children; her siblings still live in Wales.

Barbara has been married for over 20 years. She lives in a semi-detached house with her husband Alan, and two children. Alan is 10 years older than Barbara. She and Alan have 15-year-old twins, Ruth and Ben. The house was built as social housing, allowing those with lower incomes affordable living. She has lived in the house for 14 years, moving to it when the house was first built.

Barbara loves that her family were the first occupants of the house,

"So we've got the first memories in the house. So again that is important because in every room we've made all these memories in this house".

Barbara found taking photographs of "home" more difficult than she first thought it would be. By reflecting upon the printed photographs the significance of home as her sanctuary and why was revealed.

Nineteen years ago Alan had a near fatal accident, his pelvis was crushed and he was in intensive care for some time.

"He nearly didn't come home after his accident because it was touch and go".

This has had a profound effect on her life, on how she lives, behaves and the rituals she has developed as part of her home life, influencing her meaning of home.



She discusses at length the importance she places on the family never going to bed on a cross word, making sure they always "make up" before going to bed. She shares a photograph of the "make up" corner on the landing between the bedrooms. The ritual of "making up" is clearly embedded in her ritual of home-making.

"But from that moment on in my life it became important [to clear the air before going to sleep each night] because if we argued that morning and he didn't come home and things had been different ...[voice faded away]"



Nearly losing her husband and the long-term implications of his deteriorating health is evident in Barbara's photographs, and her subsequent meaning of home. The raised supports on the settees in the lounge and the grab rails in the bathroom and toilet are a clear indication, to health and social care professionals particularly, of aids for assisted living.

The panel, which consisted of non-health and social professionals, did not see the significance of these specifically, but felt that all the photographs demonstrated that Barbara needed a functional home with little attachment to personal belongings. Barbara knows that the running of the home, the decisions about décor and what goes where are all down to her. She feels she must be bossy. She jokingly feels she has obsessive compulsive disorder because everything needs to be tidy.

"I suppose I do boss the house around because I am in charge of everything and it is my way or no way".

The image of the loft hatch is very significant because everything is put away there so the house can stay tidy. Her need to be in control is driven by her belief that time is slipping away.

She refers to life "land-sliding away" the family "breaking up" as the children grow older and become adults.



When she interprets the photographs of the settee with the broken arms, where the family all sit together, she observes that, if she didn't have that settee, it would be a sign of the family breaking up.

The panel recognised that home meant family and "togetherness" for Barbara. They felt that home was a place just for Barbara and her immediate family. There was little fuss in the décor, emphasising the need for the practical and functional aspects. "Bish, bosh, bash, home decorated" was one of the expressions used by the panel.

Barbara was revealing that home was somewhere she could organise to suit her own needs and the needs of her family.

Alan has had a series of operations reconstructing his pelvis and is now unable to work. Alan remains unwell although currently physically improved.

"Because I know that Alan is like he is in his situation and he isn't well. He looks well, but he in himself he isn't well".

So Barbara has to stay strong and in charge of not only her home but her emotions. She is very proud of her efforts but feels that is not always recognised by her family. She rhetorically asks:

"So I think I'm important because I've had to fight for all this stuff. So I think that I am relevant really in this family, don't you?".

Barbara clearly becomes frustrated with her everyday life and frequently refers to feeling annoyed and angry and the need to escape either to her "swing and think" seat in the garden, driving her car or a long soak in the bath. During what Barbara calls a difficult time she has shown great resilience; she feels pride in her home and the various purchases she has made, but also in her battles with the housing association to ensure her home is prepared for her husband as his mobility decreases.

"But he doesn't need it at the stage he is now. But he will do because now we do now know he will, year by year, start deteriorating. So because there isn't anything else now they can do for him.

Probably the last five years. Because up to that point you know he was. I mean he is able to go and do loads of things. But obviously on the other hand you know we are going down rather than going forward or going up.

So things like that are important. (pause)

Researcher: So he can stay as independent as long as possible.

B: And I can. And I can. Which is why sort of I had to fight a bit harder really to get the handles really. I had to research them and do a bit of homework and fight to put them in because obviously it is an expensive thing to do".



Barbara's "swing and think seat".

There is such poignancy in how Barbara talks about her life and home. The "fighting" for support, and the feeling that they are "going down rather than going forward or going up", her husband's need and more importantly her own need to remain independent for as long as possible. This has made Barbara very attached to her home.

She dreads leaving, believing she will be forced to when her children leave home because it's a housing association house. She is counting the Christmases left in the home, really fearing the next stage in her life. She is fearful about the children leaving home, fearing losing the house and fearful of how Alan and she will occupy their time when the children have left. She says this fear has been weighing heavily upon her during the last year, making her home feel more significant than ever. Her home is a sanctuary, just for her immediate family, protecting them and herself from the outside world.

Interpreting her own photographs made Barbara reflect on what home meant. She felt home was more than the house where she lives. It is key things such as her TV, her swing and think seat, having a loft and the disability adaptations that are important for her home.

You feel her sense of despair when she says her life would fall apart if she couldn't sit in her "swing and think" seat, if she was not able to sit in the garden, whatever the weather and have time to herself.

Her car too is her sanctuary where she can escape, and play her music, loudly!

"But it's my stereo. It's my freedom, my independence, it's where I go, it's my work. It's absolutely everything. Which is why I fell apart last week when it broke down on me. Because it almost became, in fact, I was actually frightened when I didn't have that car".





Barbara loves the TV and has it on all the time, and she is very proud of it because it took her a long time to pay for it.

"So it is important to me because it was very expensive and it was one of the first ones that ever came out. So that is why it took me three years to pay it off".

But she wryly adds:

"And you can get them at two a penny now".

She takes pride in the children's trampoline, recognised by the panel as one of the oldest pieces of "furniture" in the home. Despite its 'tatty' appearance the investment in the trampoline represents time spent at home instead of unaffordable days out, and very importantly time spent together.

The functionality of the home and the apparent newness of all the possessions give the impression that there was little emotional investment in the choice of soft furnishings and that their purchase was born out of function, with choice limited by finance, time and imagination. This was noted also by the panel who felt Barbara had no real attachment to her possessions, except the TV.



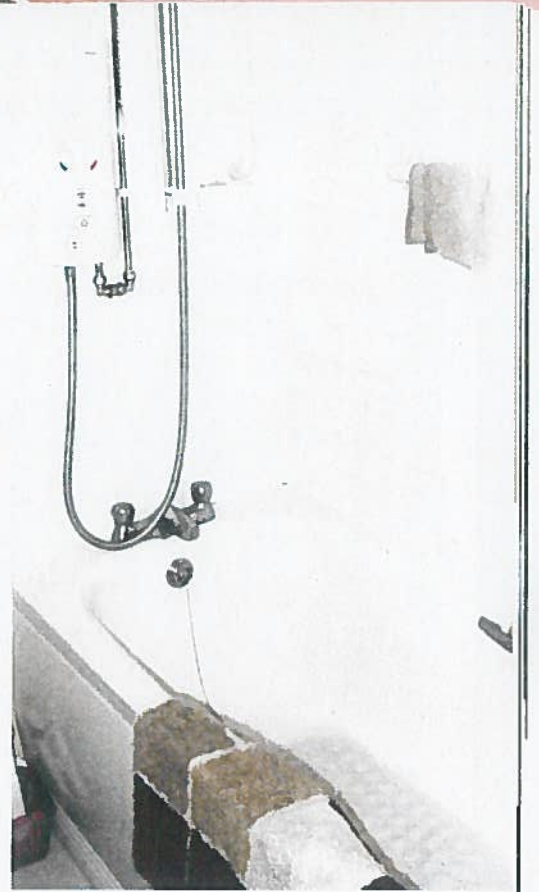
Barbara gives the impression of someone in control of her life, albeit teetering on the edge at times. Being in control at home is very important, reflected in the functional, minimalist décor and locking all the clutter in the loft.

The deeper meaning of home gradually emerges as she reflects on the photographs she has taken. Initially she focused on the various possessions she had. However, whilst reflecting on her fear of having to leave her house, she began to describe an idea of home which was more to do with the people in the house. Her home is a physical reminder of all the memories of her family life.

The panel made the same point about her idea of home; they also felt it was the family and time spent with the family that were fundamental in the meaning of Barbara's home, especially in her fear of her children leaving home. For her, home is a sanctuary, a place where her swing-seat, or her bath can give her a safe place to recover from life's trials. It was also clear that Barbara's concept of home arises from her role as mother, provider and peace-maker, a place for her family settee and her make up corner. Eventually, she summed up her meaning of home:

'Well, I suppose really, it isn't as important, the house, the structure itself isn't as important as what we first think it is. It is what is significant to take with you and to make a home. I suppose. Which is these essential items and then all the other bits are just added in when, aren't they to make it look like your home, I suppose. For me the number one key for your family home is the togetherness, for me.

That's why I took that photo [the portraits] because it is always that fear you know at some part in your life that's going to start going. Whether it's your children or you know either you or your partner. At some stage that's going to go, isn't it. And that's your daunting feeling which is why it is still really important to me now because you don't want to be thinking about that".



Paul's Story



Paul is a 47-year-old married man, living in an urban setting. He and his wife Amy have lived in their semi-detached home for 19 years. They have two teenage children, Alice who is 15 and Ian who is 13 years old, and Billy the dog, who is 5 years old.

Paul has lived in the locality all his life. He loves being near the sea, having spent his early childhood on a small island in the local harbour. When he started school his parents moved to the mainland. Paul took over 30 photographs of his home, from different angles and perspectives. He is very proud of his home. He has taken photographs looking towards his home from the front and the back, and others looking at the street and the garden view from within. With all these images he is making a clear statement of "This is where I live, this is my home".

He likes living in a house that dates back to the late 19th century and that his house is one of the oldest; he likes the many styles of building and architecture, including the new house next door. Despite believing that his house has been "squashed and squeezed" by the new builds, he loves it.

"That's the front view of the house so. It looks a bit squashed there, squeezed in between the two houses. It's a bit cramped, bit of a tight gap in there... Where it was, it was one of the original houses and everything's been building around it. It got a bit buried, you know". He also likes the familiarity of knowing the surrounding area,

"I think it is just the area, just your surroundings, isn't it? Your surroundings, you feel, it's your base, isn't it, so everything that is around it is part of being in it, you know".

Feeling his house is "squashed and squeezed", and being part of the area makes Paul feel at home. He feels secure and comforted, hugged almost by the surrounding properties. He enjoys the familiar views from all the windows, although it appears from the blinds and style of windows that home inside the front door is private space. He says home is where he is free to be himself, "It's your space. No one else is going to invade it. No one else is going to hassle you. You just come in and relax". So he likes looking out but because his house is squashed in "almost buried", he has a safe cocoon.

The outside of the house, according to the panel belies what home means to Paul. The outside of the home is ordered, with a sharply trimmed hedge. Yet within there is an explosion of personality and presentation of those who live there and what they are like. Paul also feels his home is like a nest saying, "With home, you do think of it as a base, it's a nest and stuff. It's somewhere to come back to". His "nest" is built with familiar objects and things that demonstrate not only his personality but also of the rest of the family living there. He was eager to show this with the many photographs he took.

The house was a "wreck" when they bought it, and Paul and Amy worked hard to make the house habitable. Paul feels the house has developed its own personality after being a "cold and empty place", that with all their efforts to make it a home "the house sort of takes on a bit of soul, a bit of personality". Since he and Amy are both "homemakers", the house is filled with things that they share as a couple and a family.



He feels that he has his collection of "things" because his parents' home and his auntie's home are just the same. He recalls the smell and comfort these homes offered him and appears to be replicating that in his own home. This nostalgic perspective is evident in the old metal signs he collects which are displayed around the home, but also in the display of his father's painting and a window taken from his Nana's house. Home is comforting because it displays his history and his connections with the important people in his life. His pictures also include his own history, a time that he and Amy shared before they had children, when he was a drummer in a band, but also their role now as parents.

His love of music is clearly evident by the music books and CD's on display, also in the Beatle memorabilia displayed on the walls. A picture of Ringo Starr emphasises the influence the Beatles' music had on his life, saying "any drummer's influence goes back to Ringo Star and the Beatles".

The panel however felt he was too young to have been influenced by the Beatles, perhaps revealing again how nostalgic Paul is about the past.





Paul's nest building continues in the garden. With Amy he has invested a great deal of time and effort to create a "sanctuary" there. The garden is like a "country garden" in the middle of the town. It is full of colour and, as in the house, it is clearly a place for sharing time and eating together.

It is a safe place, just like the house, "you know, it's like a nice little sanctuary to sit out there". The garden again shows the importance for Paul of nostalgia. For example he has created a nautical theme in the garden, with the buoy on display, the decking and there's also a surfboard. In this urban setting Paul enjoys the outside, believing "home is what you make it", and equal investment is placed on all aspects of his home making.

In Paul's home he has tried to create a sense of what he knew as a child, a time which he recalls fondly having experienced a very "stable" upbringing. His role as father is quite traditional; and he places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of having a family to enhance his feelings about home.



He is trying to create his own oasis just as he had when he was very little living on a small island; this is clearly evident in the large number of photographs he has taken, including of his children and their own space within the home.

Paul's home life reflects his traditional values and the importance he places in his role as a father. Traditional roles and rituals are played out in his home, with a strong commitment to providing the very best for his children. Despite not being an ardent football fan he manages his son's football team and Amy is the club secretary. Another indication that Paul's idea of home is bound up in family is that he cannot bear the thought of his home without his children in it. Even their transition to secondary school was difficult for him. He recalls taking his son to the bus stop for the first time when he went to grammar school,

"So as I dropped him off he walked around to the other side of the bus stop and he just stood there on the end, on his own, in his uniform, with all his bags. And I was sort of driving off the road thinking, God, you know, that it bloody tore my heart strings a bit, really."



For Paul home means

"everything. Seriously, yeah, you'd go mad without it really. It is. Yeah. I mean we are quite homely."

His relationships with his wife and children are central to his meaning of home. He emphasises his need for the sanctuary and safety of his home and hints at his underlying insecurity. He admits that unlike his children he did not work hard at school, hence his self-deprecating comments about how his children got to grammar school.

Behind Paul's front door is his home, a place for his family to be themselves, to grow, to share to relax, his very own nest. He believes that although his house would not suit everyone, it's his, offering him a sense of comfort and homeliness,

"That's what I like about the house; it's sort of a bit rough around the edges. With home, you do think of it as a base, it's a nest and stuff. It's somewhere to come back to. Although it is not pristine, we've still got that feel of homeliness about it".

In this safe place Paul is able to shut out the rest of the world. The panel noted from all Paul's photographs that although he appeared confident and outgoing, he also had a private self. The glimpse of his own bedroom, a private space, only showed the photograph of his children beside the bed; and the views of the street from the inside showed windows that prevented onlookers from looking into his "nest".



Paul's references to what others might think about his home, for example; "the home may be rough around the edges", "it may not be pristine", and others living "in bigger, smarter, posher houses", as well as the need for this private space suggests a vulnerability and reinforces his need for a sanctuary.

In conclusion Paul's home really does mean "everything" to him. His home provides him with sense of security, a sanctuary and a place to be himself. His home reflects the personalities living there. Partly, it reflects his tastes and personality – his love of music, his nautical background and his need for privacy. But partly it reflects his relationships with others. He has a close relationship with his wife and family, central to his meaning of home. He concluded by saying;

"It's true. When they say that home is where the heart is. I think that is a very true statement. It's true, it is".

Karen's Story





Karen was born in 1962, in Scotland. She lives in three properties, and took photographs of two of these. The interview took place in her country home. Karen is married to Rob and they have eight children. The children do not live at home full-time. They are either working abroad, or at university or at boarding school.

Karen was cautious when taking photographs of home. Prior to meeting she sought clarification on three occasions asking what photographs she should take. She didn't send the photographs in advance but had eight photographs on her camera ready for the interview, only emailing copies after the interview had taken place.



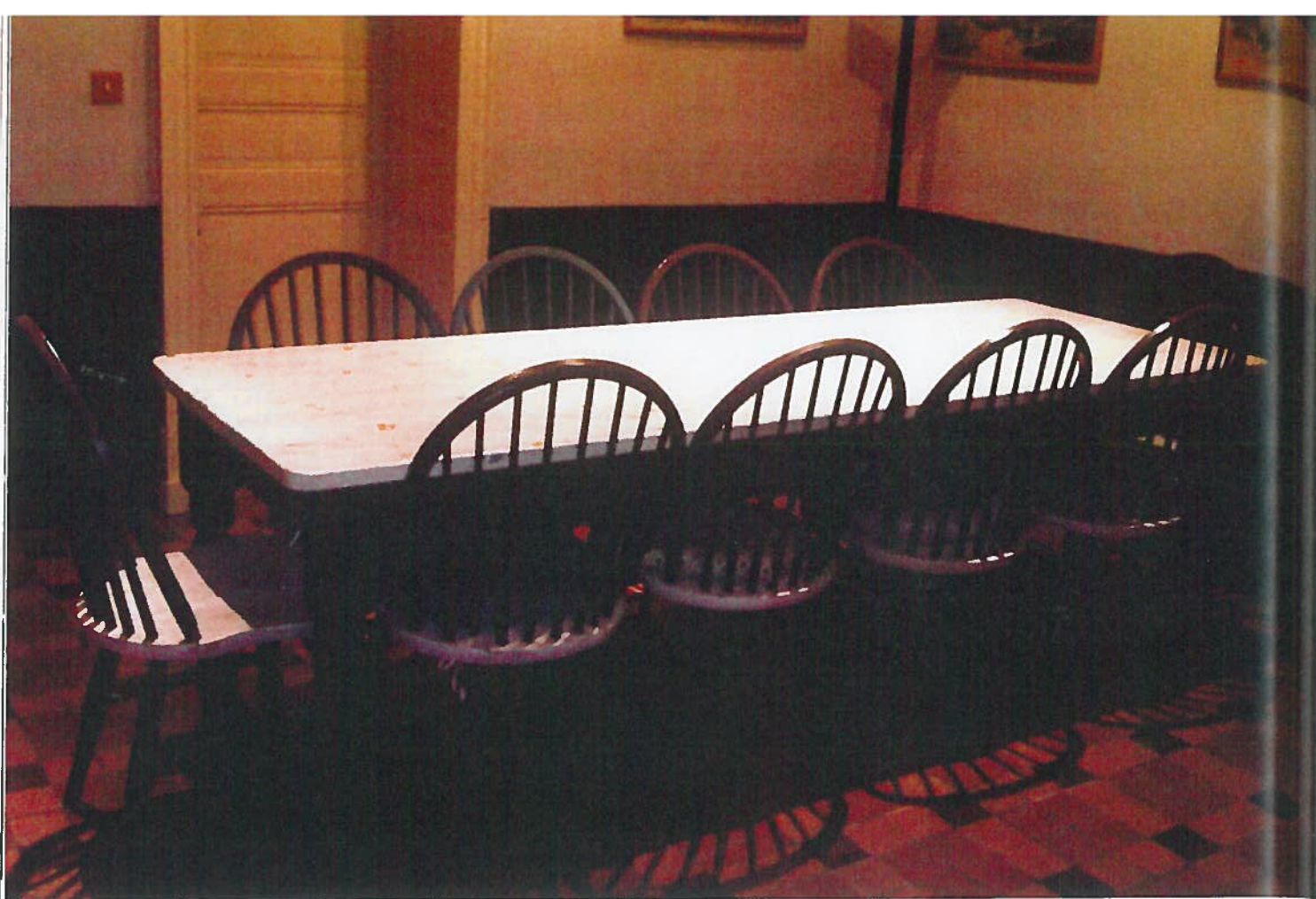
Karen and her family moved to their country home 22 years ago. At the time they had three small children and then went on to have five more. They spend the summer in their house in France, which they have owned for 17 years. Four of the photographs are from their French home, although she refers to others she could have taken there. The couple also have a large flat in the city, where Karen now spends most of her time. She did not share any images of this home.

Karen was reticent both in the photographs she took and how she articulated her meaning of home. She is keen not to reveal too much of herself whilst wanting to demonstrate that she has a clear understanding of what home means to her. However, Karen is experiencing a period of transition as her children grow up, and her articulation of home is blurry.

Despite sharing few photographs she frequently refers to images that are important to her as they evoke a sense of home. Whenever she travels she takes various images with her, ensuring she always has Blu tack in her bag to stick them up. She discussed images that she would stick on the wall all of which were about motherhood reflecting a time when her role was central in the home. She refers to a painting by Richter that depicts this period of transition well and her struggle to redefine what home now means, because her role as a mother is changing.

"There was also a really nice image of Richter of a mother and child sitting together, but really blurry. And I thought that was quite good because that is what relationships are like. They are not clear-cut. And especially around that birthing time it is really interesting how that mother-baby relationship works out".

Being a mother of eight is central both in defining her and her meaning of home. Her sense of home is influenced by nostalgic memories of the time when her children were young and time spent all together, but she is eager not to expose too much of herself or her family. She discusses how during the summer in France they all collect 'things', "pebbles, shells...twigs and bits and pieces" to make pictures of another member of the family. "But they are all quite personal. So I haven't actually taken photographs of them".



Her need to maintain her privacy was also noted by the panel. They noted that Karen was careful not to reveal too much in her photographs, with focused images revealing little of the surrounding room. For example the photograph of the rectangular dining table in her French home shows only half of the pictures on the wall.

Home means having a family and being a mother. She wonders how friends who do not have children or their own home are able to find a sense of home. She believes that a home is somewhere you chose with your partner, and over the years raise your family there together, creating a sense of home. She likes the idea of longevity; for example proud that the dining tables in both properties had always been there. A feeling of nostalgia about family life is important to feel 'at home', so she finds it difficult to understand how people who have not experienced this can find "home".

"If it has not been something that you have owned for a period of time, and not to have history in that place, whether that is significant as something that, you know, have bought together as a couple, had your children there, grown up with, watched all kinds of things happen".

This sense of history is clearly important; she refers to how old things are in all her photographs. She loves the trees in the garden, reminiscing about when the children used to have a swing and "just be there".

These images evoke memories of the past and when all her children were at home.

The country home was chosen because of the 500 year old oak tree. But she also loves the 300 year old monkey tree; she describes how it signifies motherhood to her. For example, she says:

"It is really important to me. Because since we've moved here, it pushed up the first baby on the right hand side, which is now no longer very much a baby. It is a pretty significant tree in its own right. And then just in the last few years that other one has done the something over there... And there is something about that because we are a big family here, it is as if it kind of joined in, because it is very unusual apparently for it to do that. And how it is almost resonating how we've made a home here and how we are".



Now her family are no longer living all together she decided to be based in her city home. She feels she has no attachment to the country home because it isn't how it was, saying:

"I felt that it had got to the stage that it wasn't the home that it had been anymore because so many people weren't in it, they were now off doing other things and doing their own stuff. And so it was one day a week that it was busy as it had been".

Despite not feeling that the country house is home anymore she was eager to share photographs of what it meant, suggestive that she is struggling to define what home means now.

The images of the dining tables, and the Aga, from the country home, emphasise how home is about Karen's role to nurture and nourish her children. Sitting around a table with her family, sharing time, and being "connected" to each other is very much about what home means to Karen. The photograph of the Aga is also very emotive and she recalls when all the children used to come in on Sunday and pull up cushions and sit in front of it to feel warm and cosy. At Christmas time she can fit eight pots cooking on the top! The panel felt Karen was portraying a mother who was not afraid of hard work to make sure the relationships in the home were comfortable and secure, since this was important for her meaning of home.





Memories of a busy time when her family all sat around the table together is significant for her meaning of home. Her home life had been noisy and busy, making her feel unsettled as her family life changes. She chose to share the photograph of the dining tables because of what they symbolised for her, saying:

"So I think, that was when I was sort of thinking of places around the house, that [the round dining table] was the thing that really came to mind first of all, because I mean, as we've said before, it is where everyone comes to meet together. And even when the table is bare like this, it still has such a strong presence, because it just is a different size and it just is very much what home is about and it is the place that is noisy and busy. And I suppose where you are all together across a particular space. Unlike other areas of the house and things where it gets a bit diffused. This is quite sort of intense".

As Karen's family life is changing she considers as long as she can have her own space, with her things in, she can feel at home. She demonstrates less attachment to a specific place and more to certain things. Although she doesn't reveal what those things are. In her home in France she has an enormous old cupboard. This cupboard represents her need for her own space wherever she is living, and that the concept of home can be mobile. Describing this cupboard, she said,

"So I sort of took that as a way that it is kind of a mini thing within the home that it is completely my stuff. And that sort of made me think that effectively wherever I can do that, I can make home".

Karen was careful not to reveal any more than this and did not send a copy of this photograph after the interview.



Despite spending most of her time in her city home she appears less settled there. They have only had this property for four years, so it has fewer family memories than her other homes. Although in the city home she has her "mobile home", that is a cupboard with her things, she says it is very "crammed" and very small and not quite right. She admits to feeling less at home in the city because although it is busy with her children coming and going, she feels it's like a "glorified hotel suite". She has no special chair there like she has in France, or space like her home in the country, where she can sit and meditate and find home within herself.

Karen believes that she can find the sense of home within herself just by meditating. Home is feeling safe, secure and resourced. She explained this sense of home within herself,

"The place that is really, really home to me, when I thought about it, is inside me. It's actually shutting my eyes, taking lots of deep breaths, and going inside myself and finding that place where I am sort of absolutely okay, where everything is still and quiet. And that is where I feel most at home".

Despite this she does not feel at home in London. She needs to create home within because of the changes in family life. Meditating can block out all the changes she is experiencing in her home life. Interestingly the panel felt that the photographs of the garden symbolised that relationships inside the home were less settled than the homely dining table suggested.

In conclusion, Karen refers to many images that evoke a sense of home. Most of these – the monkey tree, the tables, the Aga – refer to her children and motherhood. She also thinks of home as her own place to sit and think and her own place, the special cupboard, where she can pack and unpack home when she needs to. Having this 'mobile' concept of home is necessary because not only does she have three properties, but also how she defined home, being a mother, is going through a period of transition. She therefore needs to redefine what home now means believing that it can be found within.



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"That's what I like about the house; it's sort of a bit rough around the edges. With home, you do think of it as a base, it's a nest and stuff. It's somewhere to come back to. Although it is not pristine, we've still got that feel of homeliness about it". Paul.